Disney Plans Speed-Up Of Mineral King Project

By PETE LANG

Walt Disney wants no "Black Sunday" at Mineral King.

When his resort there opens its doors to the first visitors, he's determined it will be able to accommodate them.

So the development schedule has been changed. When the new highway there is finished, it will open — but on a large scale from the beginning.

So Robert Hicks, Disney's project coordinator, told the Times-Delta last night.

"Black Sunday," Hicks said, is how opening day at Disneyland in 1954 came to be known in retrospect.

Disney's planners simply hadn't foreseen the magnitude of response. His staff and facilities were swamped — and suffered some initial "bad press" as a result of the public inconvenience.

So the resort will be larger than first envisioned, and when it opens — in the fall of 1971, hopefully — it will be 50 per cent to two-thirds complete.

"The first substantial influx of workers will be in the summer of 1969," Hicks said. "They'll work on site development, ski lifts and slope preparation. There will be some construction.

"But the main construction will begin in the summer of 1970 and continue through the summer of 1971, to open the resort upon the scheduled fall completion of the road.

"It will be a two-year all-out effort to build the amount of facilities needed to serve the public."

Disney's early plan was to open on a relatively limited basis, building gradually to full $35 million development by 1976.

Disney's original plans were for 2,400 guest beds in the resort's hotels. He now envisions an even greater eventual total —with between 1,500 and 2,000 available on opening day.

Of an eventual payroll of more than 1,000 employes, Hicks said, about 775 will be employed from the start.

"This will represent the initial seasonal peak,"Hicks said. "Incidentally, we now look for the winter season there to utilize nearly as many employes as the summer."

SEASONAL HELP

However, more than half the employes in both seasons—all but about 300 of the first group —will be seasonal instead of permanent help, because different skills are needed. For example, about 100 ski instructors will be needed in the winter months.

Hicks said Disney looks for high utilization of his hotels in both winter and summer. "More people will go through in the summer, and fewer in the winter — but the ones in the winter will stay longer, on average," he said.

The critical job at the moment is getting plans for the proposed 23-mile highway from Three Rivers to Mineral King approved by the various agencies that must okay it.

Hicks said the routing is pretty well agreed upon, but other details need to be ironed out. One point of disagreement is known to be the road's width.

TWO-LANE ROAD

Disney hopes for a highest-standard two-lane highway—40 foot width, passing lanes where terrain permits, 50 mile-an-hour speed accommodation — similar to the Highway 198 stretch bordering Lake Kaweah.

The road will go through Sequoia National Park, however, and the National Park Service has not shown enthusiasm for greater width than 26 feet, the maximum of existing roads in the park.

Hicks said a road like Disney wants would cut present travel time from Three Rivers to Mineral King "at least in half."

He said the 23-mile highway would get a driver to Mineral King from Three Rivers comfortably in 30 to 35 minutes. The present road takes an hour to 1½ hours to traverse—about an hour and 10 or 15 minutes for most drivers.

DEVELOPMENTS

Meanwhile, Disney's methodical study goes on. This week and last have seen these developments:

1. Beginning of a new study by Economics Research Associates to predict the volume, pattern and characteristics of the winter visitor load in 1971, the resort's first open season. The study should be finished in September.

2. Start of a topographic mapping project by Voorheis Trindle Nelson Inc., civil engineers. Extensive aerial photography is under way now for this project, a six to eight-week job.

3. Beginning of a geologic study by Dames & Moore, consultants in applied earth sciences. This will give specialized engineers in fields of sanitation, water, construction, etc., data they need to know to plan for proper drainage, flood control, foundation work, sewage and water systems, slope stability and so on. This study should be finished by mid-September.

Hicks said a couple of large trailers for residential and office use will be towed to Mineral King from Disneyland next month by Transit Homes Inc. of Visalia, for use by personnel stationed in the Sierra bowl.

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